MY GIRL

BORN JAUNDICED

NEW WOMAN PROJECT

by

Laurice Elehwany

Jefferson, Pennsylvania, 1972

BLACK BACKGROUND

A GIRL'S VOICE
I was born jaundiced. Once I sat on a toilet seat at a truck stop and caught hemorrhoids. And I've learned to live with the chicken bone that's been lodged in my throat for the past three years. So I knew dad would be devastated when I told him about...

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

HARRY, 57, stands in front of the counter making a sandwich. His tomboy daughter, VADA (pronounced Vā̆dă), 11, sits at the kitchen table. She is very serious.

VADA
Dad, I don't want to upset you, but my left breast is developing at a significantly faster rate than my right...It can only mean one thing -- cancer...I'm dying.

HARRY
Hand me the mayonnaise out of the fridge.

TITLES UP

INT. FOYER - DAY

VADA and several other children stand in the foyer of an old Victorian home. One child, BILLY, wears a "Nixon - Agnew '72" pin.

VADA
Hey! You didn't pay me.

BILLY
How do I know you're gonna show us one?

VADA
You're such a baby.

(CONTINUED)

BILLY
All right here.

Billy hands Vada a quarter.

VADA
Fifty cents.

BILLY
O.K.

Billy hands Vada another quarter

VADA
Follow me and don't say a word.

Vada motions them on. They follow her to a door leading off the foyer. She slides it open.

INT. SHOWCASE CASKET ROOM

Vada enters with the children following behind her. She has them scared. The room is filled with several opened and closed caskets. Vada creeps up to a closed casket as the children look cautiously over her shoulder.

VADA
You sure you wanna see it? Or is someone gonna go yellow belly?

BILLY
(hesitantly)
I'm not chicken.

A few of the other children agree with Billy.

VADA
O.K., lean forward.

Vada puts her hands on the coffin, looks around to make sure they're still not chicken and suddenly flips the top half of the coffin open. The children shriek out in horror, but the coffin is empty. Vada laughs.

VADA
Bock, bock, bock.

BILLY
You're so weird.

HOWIE
I want my money back.

(CONTINUED)

VADA
(getting serious)
I was afraid of this.

BILLY
Of what?

VADA
Well sometimes when we get'em, they're not completely dead. Like when you cut a chicken's head off, and they still run around crazy.

BILLY
You're full of shit.

VADA
I bet she's roaming around this house somewhere. Come here.

Vada and the children exit.

INT. FOYER

Vada and the children stand on the edge of the foyer looking into the adjacent kitchen/family room.

VADA
(whispers)
There she is--in the rocking chair.

The children look at the old woman sitting in the rocker. She is motionless. The children are fascinated with her. Suddenly she begins to rock. The children become frightened and run out of the house. Vada laughs and walks over to the old woman in the chair.

VADA
Hi Gramoo!

GRAMOO doesn't respond. Vada crawls into Gramoo's lap. There's still no reaction from Gramoo. After a few seconds we hear:

HARRY (OS)
Vada, bring down my cigarettes!

Vada gets up and picks up a pack of cigarettes off the counter.

INT. BASEMENT

Vada walks down the steps with the cigarettes. She won't go past the bottom step. Harry and daughter, WENDY, work on a body. Wendy, 28, is unkempt and morose looking.

HARRY
Put'em on the counter.

Vada, not wanting to go past the bottom step, throws the cigarettes on the counter.

VADA
Guess what!

Harry and Wendy, engrossed in work, ignore Vada.

VADA
Daddy, guess what!

No response.

VADA
I beat Thomas J in hopscotch yesterday.

Suddenly, blood leaks off the table onto Harry. He jumps up.

HARRY
Damn it Wendy! For Christ's sake, it's going all over the place!

VADA
You need a lot of skill and coordination to be good at hopscotch.

WENDY
I thought I poked him in the right spot.

VADA
Thomas J's mother took us to see "101 Dalmatians." Cruella De Ville stole all the puppies. She was gonna make a fur out of 'em

HARRY
(cuts her off)
Find something to do!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Defeated, Vada walks up the stairs. She stops to read the clipboard that hangs on the wall. It reads: Layton, Charles, 70. Cancer of the prostate. Vada goes upstairs.

INT. FOYER

Vada enters. The doorbell rings. She answers it.

VADA
(shouts)
I'll get it!

Vada opens the front door. SHELLY, 43, stands there. Shelly's pretty, but dresses tacky and wears lots of makeup.

SHELLY
Hi. I'm your new makeup artist.

VADA
Hi.

Vada motions for Shelly to come in.

SHELLY
What's your name?

VADA
Vada.

SHELLY
Hi Vada. I'm Shelly.

They shake hands. Shelly looks the place over.

SHELLY
This place is sure different from the beauty parlor where I last worked.

VADA
My dad's downstairs working with my sister on Mr. Layton. It was prostate cancer. Once it hits your prostate you're a goner.

SHELLY
(a little caught off guard)
Oh I see...

(CONTINUED)

Harry walks up.

HARRY
Shelly, I'm gonna need you to get started right away. You're already late.

SHELLY
I'm sorry. See I set my clock ahead by twenty minutes so I won't be late. but then I'm too smart for myself and, I know it's twenty minutes fast so I wind up being late anyway.

Harry knits his brow.

HARRY
At least you're here now.

Vada looks out the window and sees a big camper.

VADA
Is that your camper?

SHELLY
Yes.

VADA
Do you live in it?

SHELLY
Yes.

HARRY
(to Shelly)
Ok, if you could go and fix up...

The doorbell rings cutting Harry off. Vada opens the door. TWO MEN stand there.

MAN #1
Is your father home?

Harry walks up to the door.

HARRY
Hey George.

MAN #1
Hi, Harry

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HARRY
Leave them here in the foyer. (to Shelly)
I'll just be a minute.

Man#1, Man#2 and Harry exit through the front door. Shelly snoops around in the kitchen/family room. She sees Gramoo in her rocker.

SHELLY
Hello there!

Gramoo doesn't respond.

SHELLY
Yoo hoo!

Nothing. Vada pops up behind her.

VADA
She's shy.

Shelly jumps.

VADA
How do you go to the bathroom?

SHELLY
What?

VADA
In your camper.

SHELLY
Oh, there's one in it.

VADA
That's real cool.

Shelly and Vada walk back out to the foyer where two small coffins lie on the floor. Vada stares at them as Harry bends down inspecting them. Vada stands over him.

VADA
Daddy, why are these coffins so small?

HARRY
They come in all sizes--like shoes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VADA
Are they for children?

HARRY
Of course not.

VADA
So who are they for then?

HARRY
Short people, very short people.

Vada thinks about that for a second. Shelly is uneasy with Harry's lying. She begins to nervously move her head around and cracks her neck. It makes a loud sound. Vada and Harry look at her.

SHELLY
I'm double jointed.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Vada enters. A NURSE sits behind a counter.

NURSE
Hello, Miss Vada. What's wrong today?

VADA
I'm very sick.

NURSE
Ok, take a seat, and I'll see if Dr. Welty has time to see you.

The nurse exits. Vada sits down and picks up the American Medical Journal and reads. Seconds later, the nurse comes back.

NURSE
Ok missy, go on in.

As Vada walks to the examining room, she sees a sickly little boy in a wheelchair. Vada is taken aback by the sight. Was Harry lying?

INT. DOCTOR'S EXAMINING ROOM

Vada sits on the examining table. DR. WELTY, 70, checks her throat, ears and eyes.

CONTINUED:

VADA
Well, what is it? I can handle it.

Welty stops examining her.

WELTY
You're perfectly healthy

VADA
(disappointed)
That can't be. I have all the classic symptoms. And my hair's falling out.

WELTY
Vada, why do you do this? There's nothing wrong with you. Did they bring Mr. Layton to your house today?

VADA
I'll just have to get a second opinion.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE

Vada walks out and over to her bike. Thomas J, 11, sickly-looking, with tape over his glasses, walks up to her.

THOMAS J
What'd he say is wrong with you?

VADA
The whole medical profession is a crock.

Vada gets on her bike, complete with banana seat, and pedals away. Thomas J rides behind trying to keep up on his old fashioned girl's bike.

THOMAS J
Wait up for me!

EXT. STREET

Vada and Thomas J ride their bikes down the sidewalk.

VADA
Thomas J, look no hands.

Vada rides with no hands on the handle bars.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

THOMAS J
Oh ya, look at this--no feet.

Thomas J holds his legs away form the pedals.

THOMAS J
Are you watchin'?

Vada pays no attention to him. She looks at a man painting his house on a ladder. She stops her bike, and Thomas J pulls up beside her.

THOMAS J
What ya lookin' at?

VADA
That's Mr. Bixler.

THOMAS J
So?

VADA
Let's go talk to him.

THOMAS J
I don't wanna talk to no teacher. It's the summer.

Vada doesn't pay any attention to Thomas J. She heads toward MR. BIXLER.

VADA
Hi, Mr. Bixler.

BIXLER
(sun blinding his eyes)
Hi. Who's that?

VADA
It's me, Vada Sultenfuss.

BIXLER
Oh Vada, how are you?

Bixler, 31, comes down off his ladder.

VADA
Fine.

BIXLER
How's the summer treating you?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VADA
It's all right.

BIXLER
Hi Thomas.

THOMAS J
Hi.

VADA
How come you're painting this old house?

BIXLER
I just bought it, and I'm fixing it up.

VADA
Mr. Bixler, I finished all the books for summer reading.

BIXLER
Really? Already? The summer's just begun.

VADA
Yes, and now I'm reading "War And Peace" for fun.

BIXLER
No wonder you're my prized pupil. How about you, Thomas?

THOMAS J
I haven't started yet.

BIXLER
Vada, you better get on his case.

VADA
Where are you gonna get the money to pay for this house if you're not working?

BIXLER
I'm teaching a creative writing class at the community center this summer. So I'm doing some work.

VADA
How much does it cost?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BIXLER
The house?

VADA
No, the class.

BIXLER
35 dollars.

VADA
Oh. Come on Thomas J.

Vada and Thomas J pedal away.

VADA and THOMAS J
Bye.

BIXLER
Stop by again sometime.

They pedal down the street a bit then stop.

THOMAS J
Let's go down to Fike's orchard and pick some peaches.

VADA
Nah, I'm going home.

THOMAS J
Why? It's not dinner time yet.

Vada pedals away leaving a confused Thomas J behind.

EXT. FRONT YARD

Vada jumps off her bike, letting it fall to the ground, and runs inside.

INT. VADA'S BEDROOM

Vada enters the pink room. She goes to her closet, pulls a box out and goes through it. She pulls out her class picture and gazes with lovestruck eyes at Mr. Bixler. She lies back on the bed dreaming.

INT. KITCHEN/FAMILY ROOM - EARLY EVENING

Harry, Wendy, Vada and Gramoo sit around the table eating dinner.

HARRY
Pass the potatoes.

Wendy passes them.

HARRY
There was a bad accident on the highway. They'll be bringing two in tomorrow.

The family eats in silence for a few seconds. Gramoo stares at her food. Suddenly, Vada shrieks out loud and falls back in her chair. Just as she does, Shelly comes up from the basement.

SHELLY
I just finished Mr. Layton's hair. He looks....

Shelly suddenly notices Vada on the floor. She rushes over to her.

SHELLY
Harry, she's hurt!

HARRY
She's just pretending.

VADA
(coming to)
I think it's my prostate.

Shelly is shocked at the family's indifference. She kneels beside Vada. Suddenly Gramoo breaks out into singing "Anything Goes" in a booming voice. Vada closes her eyes, and we hear:

VADA (VO)
Gramoo always wanted to be a famous singer, but she married a mortician instead. She'd of even settled for Vaudeville. If I wasn't going to die, I think I would have liked to be the girl who rides bareback in the circus.

INT. HALLWAY AT THOMAS J'S HOUSE - DAY

Vada stands outside the bathroom door as Thomas J comes out tucking his shirt in.

VADA
Five.

THOMAS J
I counted six.

VADA
Liar, it was five.

THOMAS J
I quit.

VADA
All right baby, I'll give you five and a half.

THOMAS J
Ok, your turn.

INT. BATHROOM

Vada enters. She shuts the door behind her, walks over to the sink and fills a glass with water.

THOMAS J(OS)
Hurry up in there!

VADA
Hold your horses. It takes girls longer.

Vada pours the water into the toilet.

VADA
Start!

THOMAS J(OS)
One...Two...

INT. HALLWAY

Thomas J counts.

THOMAS J
Three...four...five...six...seven

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VADA(OS)
I win! I can hold more pee than you!

Thomas J waits for a few seconds then Vada comes out of the bathroom.

THOMAS J
You always win.

VADA
That's 'cause my mama was an Arabian princess, and they can hold their water like a camel.

THOMAS J
She was not.

VADA
She was so!

Vada tackles Thomas J to the floor and holds him down.

VADA
Say my mother was an Arabian princess.

THOMAS J
No!

VADA
Say it or else I'll give you a black eye!

THOMAS J
Get off! You're gonna give me asthma!

VADA
I'm givin' you to three. One...two...

THOMAS J
Ok, ok she was an Arabian princess

VADA
And she was the most beautiful woman in the whole wide world.

THOMAS J
And the most beautiful woman, get off!

VADA
Ok.

CONTINUED:

Vada gets off. They sit beside each other and breathe heavily. After a few seconds, Thomas J jumps up and shouts:

THOMAS J
Your mother looked like the Mona Lisa!

Vada chases him.

VADA
Don't you say that about my mother!

INT. VIEWING ROOM

Shelly finishes fixing up an old woman.

SHELLY
Harry, come see.

Harry walks over and looks in the coffin. We do not see the body. Shelly nervously awaits his opinion. She cracks her neck.

HARRY
I thought I gave you a picture a what she looked like?

SHELLY
You did, here.

Shelly fumbles around in her purse and pulls a picture out. We see a photo of a very prim and proper elderly woman with an old fashioned hairdo wearing a dress buttoned to the neck.

HARRY
She was Reverend Dennis' wife. You have her looking like a call girl.

We see the body: wearing a ton of makeup, false eyelashes, hot pink lipstick, plenty of blue eyeshadow, and a tacky hairdo. Her dress is unbuttoned showing a little cleavage.

SHELLY
I guess I got carried away.

HARRY
Fix it.

Harry walks away. Shelly runs after him

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHELLY
Harry...Harry.

Harry stops.

SHELLY
I was wondering if there was something wrong with Vada?

HARRY
What do you mean?

SHELLY
At dinner the other night...

HARRY
That? She just likes to play.

SHELLY
I don't know. I think she's confused about death.

HARRY
(annoyed)
She was raised in a funeral home. She knows more about it than anyone else.

SHELLY
Yeah, but I thi-k she...

HARRY
(cuts her off)
She's a perfectly happy eleven year old. Don't give me any advice on my daughter.

Harry exits to kitchen. Shelly grabs her purse and storms out.

EXT. PORCH

Shelly walks out in a huff, sits down on the steps and pulls a candy bar out of her purse. Vada and Thomas J run down to the porch. Vada suddenly stops when she sees three of her female classmates walking on the sidewalk--two brunette girls and a pretty blonde girl named JUDY. Thomas J also stops. Shelly watches the encounter.

GIRL #1
Look, it's Vada and her little boyfriend.

CONTINUED:

VADA
He is not my boyfriend.

GIRL #2
I bet she kisses him on the lips.

VADA
(points to Thomas J)
Do you think I'd kiss that ugly old thing.

THOMAS J
Yeah, anyway.

Thomas J realizes he's insulted himself.

JUDY
Come on, let's go, the matinee'll be starting soon.

GIRL #1
Judy's father owns the Avalon theatre, and we get to see all the movies we want for free.

GIRL #2
And all the popcorn we can eat.

JUDY
Maybe you could come sometime.

GIRL #2
Ew, don't invite her.

GIRL #1
Yeah, she'll have to bring her boyfriend with her.

The two girls walk away. Judy hesitates and makes eye contact with Vada. The other two shout:

GIRL #1&2
Vada and Thomas sitting in a tree, k-i-s-s-i-n-g first comes love then comes marriage then comes Thomas J in the baby carriage.

Vada and Thomas J sit beside Shelly on the front steps.

CONTINUED:

SHELLY
(re: candy bar)
Would you like a piece?

Vada shakes her head "no." She's upset.

SHELLY
Thomas?

THOMAS J
I'm allergic to it.

SHELLY
To chocolate?

VADA
He's allergic to everything.

THOMAS J
Let's ride down to the lake

VADA
Leave me alone.

THOMAS J
What did I say?

VADA
Vada, you shouldn't let those girls upset you.

VADA
I'm not upset. I would never play with those girls. I only surround myself with people I find intellectually stimulating.

Shot of Thomas J with a blank look on his face.

SHELLY
That's a pretty ring you're wearing.

Shelly points to Vada's ring.

VADA
It's a mood ring. It tells what mood I'm in.

Shelly
Really?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

THOMAS J
It doesn't work. It always stays black.

VADA
It's only black when you're around. 'Cause you put me in a bad mood.

SHELLY
Maybe black means you're happy?

VADA
I don't think so. (beat) Shelly, how can I get 35 dollars?

SHELLY
What do you need it for?

THOMAS J
To be with her sweetie pie.

VADA
Shut up Thomas J!

THOMAS J
She's crazy. She wants to go to school over the summer.

SHELLY
What school?

VADA
It's not real school, a creative writing class. I wanna be a writer.

THOMAS J
She only wants to take it 'cause Mr. Bixler's the teacher.

VADA
I told you to shut your big, fat mouth.

Vada pushes him.

SHELLY
Well I think you'd be a fine writer. Maybe someday you'll even write greeting cards. Did you ask you dad?

VADA
He won't give it to me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHELLY
You don't know that. Go and ask him.

INT. KITCHEN/FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

Harry and Vada watch TV. Harry lounges in his lazy boy, half asleep. We hear the theme to "Love, American Style" on the TV. It wakes Harry up.

HARRY
Vada, take my shoes off.

This nightly ritual doesn't phase Vada at all. She takes his shoes off.

Harry
And the socks too.

Vada talks while taking his shoes and socks off.

VADA
Daddy, can I have 35 dollars?

HARRY
That's a lot of money for a little girl.

VADA
It's for school. A summer writing class.

HARRY
You're not flunking anything are you?

VADA
No.

HARRY
Separate the toes too.

Vada separates his toes.

HARRY
Last week you wanted to play the violin, and then you were going to be a ventriloquist.

VADA
Shelly thinks I'd be a good writer.

CONTINUED:

HARRY
She said that?

VADA
Yep.

HARRY
Sorry, maybe next summer.

VADA(VO)
(while separating his toes)
He forgot about the time I wanted to be a magician. I was really great at making myself disappear.

INT. FOYER - DAY

Vada kicks a ball around. Harry and Wendy come up from the basement leaving the basement door open.

VADA
You wanna play kickball?

HARRY
Vada, we have to ride out to the cemetery. Shelly'll be here any minute. (to Wendy) Let's hurry.

Harry and Wendy leave. Vada accidentally kicks the ball downstairs. She goes after it.

INT. BASEMENT - NEXT SECOND

The room is dimly lit. Vada goes down the stairs and abruptly stops at the bottom stair afraid to go further. We see her trying to decide whether to get her ball or go deeper into the basement. Seconds later, she makes her decision and runs beyond the bottom step.

INT. FOYER - SAME TIME
Shelly enters from the front door, sees the basement door open and shuts it.

Vada finds her ball. As she walks back up, she sees a male corpse lying on the table. It scares her. She frantically runs up the stairs and tries to open the door, but it's

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

stuck. Her ball flies out of her hands and down the stairs. She becomes hysterical and kicks and bangs on the door.

VADA
(while kicking and banging)
Let me out! Please! He's gonna kill me! Help!

Vada puts her hands over her ears and sings to distract herself. She crouches on the top stair into the fetal position and closes her eyes.

VADA
(sings)
You twinkle above us, blitie, blop, bloopie, nibbie, nobby, noobie, la, la, la, low low...good morning starshine....

INT. FOYER - SECONDS LATER

Shelly walks by the closed door and hears Vada singing.

SHELLY
Vada!

Vada doesn't answer and continues to sing. Shelly tugs at the door and finally opens it.

INT. BASEMENT

Shelly sees Vada crouched up against the wall singing. Vada has gotten herself so wrapped up that she isn't aware of Shelly. Shelly taps her.

SHELLY
Vada.

She scares Vada.

SHELLY
What happened?

VADA
(coming out of it)
My ball, I lost my ball.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Shelly pulls Vada up.

SHELLY
Come on sweetheart

INT. FOYER

Vada runs to Gramoo

INT. KITCHEN/FAMILY ROOM

Vada jumps into Gramoo's lap and hugs her burying her head in her chest. Gramoo doesn't respond. Shelly crouches beside her.

SHELLY
Vada, it's all right. Don't be frightened. Hey you know what my mother usta do when I got scared?

Vada doesn't answer.

SHELLY
Well she said I should close my eyes and imagine the most beautiful place in the whole world. A place with rainbows, and flowers and little bunnies. And she said as long as I was thinking of it, I'd always be safe there.

VADA
What were you scared of?

SHELLY
This is gonna sound silly, but when I was just about your age, my uncle took me to see "The Wizard of Oz." Did you ever see it?

Vada nods her head "yes."

SHELLY
Well I loved the scarecrow and the cowardly lion, but I was terrified of all the little dwarfs in Oz. I couldn't sleep at night because I thought they lived under my bed.

CONTINUED:

VADA
They can't help it if they're little.

SHELLY
I know, but I thought they'd tickle me. Come on, Vada. Let go of Gramoo. You're too big to be sitting on her lap. Come here.

Vada slowly gets off Gramoo's lap.

VADA
Are there willow trees in your special place.

SHELLY
Yes, I think so.

INT. FRONT YARD - DAY

One end of a jumping rope is tied to a pillar on the front porch. Vada swings the other end as Thomas J skips the rope.

VADA
Seven...eight...

THOMAS J
Go faster!

VADA
I can't. My arm hurts.

Shelly drives up in her camper. Vada sees her and lets go of the rope. As a result, Thomas J falls.

THOMAS J
Hey what'd ya do that for?

VADA
Let's ask Shelly if we can look inside her camper.

Thomas J brushes himself off and gets up.

THOMAS J
Ok.

They run to the camper and stop Shelly as she gets out.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VADA
Can we look around in your camper?

SHELLY
Sure, I'll give you the royal tour.

INT. CAMPER

Thomas J pokes his head through beads that are hanging between the body of the camper and the driver's seat.

THOMAS J
Wow! This is the coolest thing.

Thomas J pushes his way through the beads as Vada and Shelly follow.

THOMAS J
And you can really eat and sleep here?

SHELLY
Yep.

Shelly pushes the beads to one side. Thomas J jumps behi the wheel and pretends to drive. He makes sound effects to accompany his driving.

THOMAS J
I'm gonna drive us to Buffalo.

SHELLY
Buffalo?

Vada whispers to her.

VADA
It's the only place he's ever been to. His aunt lives there.

SHELLY
Oh...would you guys like a soda?

VADA
I would!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHELLY
Thomas?

THOMAS
Yes please.

Shelly opens the small refrigerator, pulls two sodas out and places them on the table. Thomas J and Vada sit around the table. Shelly pulls a tiny tray of miniature ice cubes out.

THOMAS J
Wow! Look at how small those ice cubes are! Vada, look.

Vada's not interested in the ice cubes. She's interested in the romance novel lying on the table.

THOMAS J
What are you reading?

Shelly turns around and sees Vada studying her book.

SHELLY
You shouldn't be looking at that. It's a little too old for you.

Vada spots about twenty more romance novels on the shelf behing her.

VADA
Did you read all these books?

SHELLY
Yes.

VADA
What are they about?

SHELLY
Love and romance.

THOMAS J
Ew, gross.

SHELLY
They're just fun to read.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VADA
Are you married?

SHELLY
No, I'm divorced.

VADA
Daddy said it's bad when people get divorced.

SHELLY
Sometimes married people find out that they just can't live together.

THOMAS J
The Meyers are divorced.

Thomas J sees a cookie jar on the table.

THOMAS J
Shelly, can I have a cookie?

Before Shelly can answer, Thomas J reaches in the jar and pulls out dollar bills instead of cookies.

THOMAS J
Hey where are the cookies?

SHELLY
Oops, you found my special hiding place.

THOMAS J
What are you saving for?

SHELLY
Nothing special, just putting it away for a rainy day.

The cuckoo clock above the refrigerator lets out one cuck
Thomas J jumps up.

THOMAS J
Uh-oh, I was supposed to be home at noon for lunch. Thanks Shelly. See ya Vada!

Thomas J leaves.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHELLY
Well Miss Vada, what'd you say we go back over.

VADA
Can I use your bathroom first?

SHELLY
Sure.

VADA
You don't have to wait. Daddy'll be mad if you're late anyway.

SHELLY
All righty.

Vada slowly walks to the bathroom. Once Shelly is gone, Vada sneaks over to the cookie jar and pockets some of t money. As she takes it we hear:

VADA(VO)
Once in the second grade, my class went swimming at the YMCA. I found a hairball in the drain of one of the showers. I don't know why I ate it...but I do know that it tasted better than the castor oil Mrs. Baublitz made me drink afterwards.

INT. COMMUNITY CENTER - DAY

Several hippies sit around a table. They are a mix of men and women in their late twenties. Mr. Bixler is also present. RED FLOWER stands up reciting a poem.

RED FLOWER
I sang a song for you to hear,
I painted a picture for you to see,
I picked a rose for you to smell,
I planted grass for you to touch.
But you did not hear my song,
You did not see my picture,
You did not smell my rose,
And you did not touch my grass.

The class claps for him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TAMARA
Oh wow! I really felt that.

Red Flower sits down. Vada enters. All turn to see her.

BIXLER
Vada? What are you doing here?

VADA
I paid the money.

BIXLER
For the class?

VADA
Yes, I want to be a writer.

BIXLER
But this is an adult poetry class. I don't think you'll fit in.

RED FLOWER
Hey man, I think it's real beautiful. She wants to write poetry. Children are so beautiful man.

PERSEPHONE
Yeah, power to you my oppressed little sister.

BIXLER
(shrugs)
Ok. Please take a seat.

Vada sits between TAMARA and Red Flower. She looks completely out of place.

PERSEPHONE
You know, I experienced something the other day with my old man, and I wrote a poem on it.

GLENN
Share away, Persephone.

PERSEPHONE
Sure thing.

CONTINUED:

Persephone stands up to read.

PERSEPHONE
He covers me like a blanket from the cold, damp night, as I look into his eyes, I know it's right. To touch, to feel to know he's real. Flesh all amesh. Flesh all amesh. I can't fight it- there's no point. I wake up and light a joint.

Everyone, except Vada, is a little hot from the piece. Vada raises her hand.

BIXLER
Yes?

VADA
I wrote a poem too.

BIXLER
Please.

Bixler motions for Vada to stand up in front of the clas She stands up.

VADA
Ode to Ice Cream by Vada Sultenfuss.
I like ice cream a whole lot,
it tastes good on days that are hot.
On a cone or in a dish,
this would be my only wish.
Vanilla, chocolate or rocky road,
even with pie---a la mode. (pause)
That's all I got so far.

Everyone is afraid to comment on the poem, but Bixler finally speaks up.

BIXLER
That was...ah nice, Vada.

RED FLOWER
You know it's sweet, and it rhymes and everything, but you're not expressing what you feel in your soul.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TAMARA
Yeah, tell us how you see the world. Your fears, your dreams, your innermost secrets. They're there. Find them and share them with us.

Vada sits down.

VADA(VO)
My fears, my secrets. (beat) I'm afraid I killed my mother.

INT. KITCHEN/FAMILY ROOM - DAY

Gramoo sits in her rocker motionless. Harry crouches down with a bowl of soup and spoonfeeds her. He's very patient and kind to her.

HARRY
Here, Mama.

Gramoo eats the soup. As Harry feeds her, Shelly walks by in the foyer, stops and watches them.

HARRY
One more spoonful.

Gramoo accepts it, and Harry puts the bowl down.

HARRY
Your hair's all a mess. I'll fix it.

Harry pulls a comb out of his back pocket and combs her hair. After a few seconds Shelly walks into the room.

SHELLY
Harry.

Harry, a bit startled, turns around to see her. He stops combing Gramoo's hair.

HARRY

Oh hi...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHELLY
I just wanted to let you know that the room's all set up, and I arranged the flowers they delivered.

HARRY
Thank you.

There is silence. Both are uncomfortable. Shelly cracks her neck.

HARRY
Um...I want to apologize for the other day about Vada. I was a little harsh.

SHELLY
No, I shouldn't be sticking my nose into other people's business. It's just that I like Vada so much.

Harry picks up the comb and combs Gramoo's hair.

HARRY
(while combing)
After my wife died, Gramoo moved in with us to take care of Vada. They were very close. But lately as her mind's been wandering more and more, Vada's been acting a little crazy. (beat) But she'll snap out of it.

SHELLY
I'm sure she will.

Harry and Shelly share a slight smile.

EXT. LAKE - DAY

Vada and Thomas J sit under a huge weeping willow tree fishing. Their poles lie on the ground.

THOMAS J
Nothing's biting today.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Thomas J gets up and climbs the tree.

VADA
Maybe they had a big breakfast.

Thomas J hangs upside down from a branch. His shirt slides up.

THOMAS J
Look at me!

VADA
Big deal. I can do that too

THOMAS J
I'm gonna be an acrobat when I grow up.

Thomas J's glasses fall off.

VADA
Your mother won't let you.

THOMAS J
Hey, my glasses fell off.

Thomas J's red and white bobber begins bobbing.

VADA
Thomas J, you got something!

THOMAS J
Oh no.

Thomas J falls out of the tree.

VADA
Hurry!

Thomas J look on the ground for his glasses.

THOMAS J
I can't find my glasses.

Vada grabs his pole. Thomas J finds his glasses, runs over to Vada and grabs the pole from her.

VADA
Reel it in!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

THOMAS J
I'm trying.

Thoms J struggles with the pole, but finally reels it in. At the end of his line is a small fish.

VADA
It's only a sunny. Throw it back.

THOMAS J
I don't like touching fish.

VADA
You caught it.

Thomas J thinks for a second. He then lays the fish on grass and lightly steps on it with one foot.

VADA
What are you doing?

THOMAS J
I'm gonna pull the hook out without havin' to touch it.

Thomas J pulls on the line. The hook yanks at the fish's lip. This upsets Vada.

VADA
You're hurting him! Don't kill him.

THOMAS J
I can't get the hook out!

VADA
Stop it! Move!

Vada pushes Thomas J aside. She picks up the fish and wriggles the hook out of his mouth. Suddenly the hook pricks her.

VADA
Ouch!

Vada throws the fish in the water. Blood runs down her thumb.

VADA
I'm bleeding.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Thomas J examines her thumb.

VADA
Darn hook. Did he get away? Go look.

Thomas J walks to the water and sees the fish floating on the top.

THOMAS J
(pushing her so she won't see the fish)
Yeah, he got away. Come on let's go. I'm sick of fishing.

Thomas J picks up the poles.

VADA
Hey, since my finger's bleeding, let's become blood brothers.

THOMAS J
No, I don't want to.

Thomas J pulls her.

VADA
Why are you in such a hurry? I'll prick you real quick. It doesn't hurt that much.

THOMAS J
No. Come on.

VADA
Hey, you could pick that scab on your arm.

THOMAS J
It's a mosquito bite.

VADA
It'll bleed

THOMAS J
If I do it can we go?

VADA
Yes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

They sit down. Thomas J picks the scab on his arm till i bleeds.

VADA
Ok, rub them together.

Vada rubs her thumb on his scab.

VADA
Now we're blood brothers for life.

Thomas J and Vada get up and walk home. We see a close u of the dead fish.

INT. FOYER - DAY

A viewing has just begun. Several mourners walk by. Vad shuts the sliding door that closes off the kitchen/family room and locks it. She holds a game of Scrabble.

INT. BASEMENT

Vada opens the door to the basement and sticks her Scrabb game between the door and the wall so it won't completely close. She walks downstairs. Wendy sits on a stool reading. Vada sits on the steps.

VADA
Do you wanna play Scrabble?

WENDY
No.

VADA
Monopoly? I'll give you Boardwalk and Park Place.

WENDY
No, did you lock Gramoo up?

Vada shakes her head "yes."

VADA
Is she mad at me?

WENDY
Gramoo?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VADA
She doesn't talk to me anymore.

WENDY
Vada, she's old. She's senile.

VADA
Daddy's old.

WENDY
Not like Gramoo.

VADA
How long is she gonna stay senile for?

WENDY
People don't get better from it.

Vada thinks about this for a second.

VADA
(laughs)
Remember when she usta dance with me? I would stand on her feet, and we would dance in the kitchen.

WENDY
You're really annoying me.

VADA
Why do you always wanna stay down here?

WENDY
Usually it's quiet, and I can read.

VADA
But don't ya wanna go swimming or ride bikes?

WENDY
Vada, you're just a mere child still unscathed by the harshness and cruelties of life.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VADA
I'll throw in Marvin Gardens.

Wendy continues reading. Vada slowly walks up the stairs

VADA(VO)
My sister's a lot older than me. Daddy said I was a surprise. Steven Wallace once put a spider down my back....I didn't like that surprise.

INT. CASKET SHOWROOM - DAY

Harry polishes the caskets as Shelly enters. Harry doesn't turn around.

HARRY
What can I do for you?

SHELLY
Nothing. Just wanted to see what you were up to.

HARRY
These things get so dusty in here.

Shelly walks up behind Harry and sniffs behind his neck.

SHELLY
Yum, what smells so good?

HARRY
(a bit mystified)
That? Formaldehyde?

SHELLY
Oh.

Shelly need to think of a new tactic. Harry continues t dust.

SHELLY
Harry, do you ever go to the movies?

HARRY
No, not really.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHELLY
How about out to dinner?

HARRY
Not too often.

Shelly's annoyed.

SHELLY
Do I have to hit you over the head?

HARRY
(looking up)
Huh?

SHELLY
(meekly)
I want to know if you'd like to go out with me.

Shelly cracks her neck. Harry gets up and faces her.

HARRY
The last date I had was probably back in 1941, but I remember doing the asking.

SHELLY
The times they are a'changing.

HARRY
No, I'm still too old fashioned to let a woman take the reigns. Hand me that rag.

Harry begins to dust again. Shelly's disappointed. She picks a rag off another coffin, hands it to Harry and walks out.

HARRY
(never looking up)
But, if you want to go with me to the church bingo game tomorrow night, you're welcome to.

Shelly smiles.

INT. HARRY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Harry is all dressed up putting the final touches on as Vada walks by. She stops and looks in.

VADA
Why are you all dressed up to play bingo?

HARRY
Just want to look nice.

VADA
You never cared before.

HARRY
Shelly's coming over, and we're gonna go together.

VADA
Why?

HARRY
She likes to play bingo.

VADA
Can I go too?

Harry walks out and pats her on the head.

HARRY
You stay and keep Gramoo company.

INT. FOYER

Harry walks down the stairs and out the front door as Vada watches him leave. She sits on the steps and looks lost in thought. Suddenly she jumps up and runs out the front door.

INT. STREET

Vada runs down the street and stops at Thomas J's house. She climbs a tree in his yard, peeks into the house and sees Thomas J eating dinner with his mother and father. She waves at him to get his attention and motions for hi to come outside.

EXT. PORCH

Thomas J sneaks out of his house. He quietly walks around looking for Vada.

THOMAS J
(quietly)
Vada...Vada, where are you?

VADA
Here!

Vada jumps out of the tree and startles him.

THOMAS J
Dont' do that!

VADA
Sorry.

THOMAS J
What do you want? My mom'll skin me alive if she knew I was out here.

VADA
Let's go down to the church hall. They're playing bingo tonight.

THOMAS J
I told you I'd get in trouble.

VADA
You're a big fat sissy! Scairdy cat!

THOMAS J
Am not!

ADA
Bed wetter!

THOMAS J
I stopped that!

Vada runs off. Thomas J chases her.

EXT. CHURCH HALL

Harry helps Shelly get out of the car. They walk to the hall. Vada and Thomas J run to the hall. Vada spots Harry's parked car.

THOMAS J
Are we gonna play?

VADA
No, we'll just watch. Come on!

INT. CHURCH HALL

The hall is filled with mid to very senior citizens. Everyone takes notice of Shelly with Harry. A few people walk by and say "hello" to Harry. Three elderly women, the DEBOLT SISTERS, whisper frantically among themselves and keep looking over at Harry and Shelly. Harry and Shelly sit down. The Debolt sisters sit at the end of th same table still whispering. An ELDERLY MAN and WOMAN sit across from Harry and Shelly. An ANNOUNCER sits in the front of the room.

ANNOUNCER
All right, is everybody ready?

A few "yeses" are heard. The Announcer reaches into the barrel next to him and pulls a chip out.

ANNOUNCER
I-34

Everyone checks his card. Harry and Shelly don't have i The Debolt sisters cover their cards by cupping their ha so no one can see. The elderly man and woman check thei card.

ELDERLY WOMAN
(shouting to her husband)
What'd he say?

ELDERLY MAN
He said Z-11

ANNOUNCER(OS)
B-4

Everyone checks.

INT. CHURCH HALL COAT ROOM - SAME TIME

Vada and Thomas J watch the game. Thomas J spots Harry and Shelly and points to them.

THOMAS J
Hey, there's your dad and Shelly!

Vada quickly pushes his hand down.

VADA
Shh, I don't want them to see me.

THOMAS J
Why not?

VADA
'Cause I'll get in trouble.

INT. CHURCH HALL - MINUTES LATER

The game continues. Harry and Shelly now have a few ker of corn on their cards. Shelly begins to rub Harry's ar He becomes embarrassed. His face turns red.

ANNOUNCER(OS)
G-46

Everyone checks his card. Shelly rubs the back of Harry neck. The elderly woman stares right at them. Harry's extremely uncomfortable. He fidgets trying to put a lit distance between he and Shelly.

ELDERLY MAN
(shouts to wife)
X-13

He checks his wife's card. Nothing. The elderly woman no longer interested in the game. She finds Harry and Shelly much more fascinating.

HARRY
(to elderly woman)
Um...How are you tonight, Mrs. Swope?

ELDERLY WOMAN
(to her husband)
What did he say?!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELDERLY MAN
He wants to sell you some dope!

ELDERLY WOMAN
Oh my!

Offended, the elderly man and woman get up and move to another table.

INT. COAT ROOM - MINUTES LATER

Vada watches intensely. Thomas J sits on the floor with his face in his hands looking down at the ground.

THOMAS J
Can we go yet? It's no fun just watching.

VADA
Go!

THOMAS J
You know I'm not allowed to go out by myself after dark.

Vada sees Harry and Shelly looking into each other's eye Shelly looks like she's going to lean over and kiss Harr Vada's not taking any chances. We hear:

VADA
Bingo!

A collective sigh of disappointment is heard. Everyone clears his card. Harry and Shelly don't get to kiss.

ANNOUNCER
Will the winner raise their hand.

Everyone looks around for the winner, but no one raises hand.

ANNOUNCER
What's going on here?

The people are furious.

INT. COAT ROOM - SAME TIME

Vada and Thomas J watch.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VADA
Now we can go!

They run out.

EXT. THOMAS J'S HOUSE

Vada and Thomas J run to his front yard. They flop down the grass.

THOMAS J
You're crazy.

VADA
You thought it was funny.

They laugh.

THOMAS J'S MOTHER(OS)
Thomas are you out there?

THOMAS J
Shut up!

Thomas J puts his hand over Vada's mouth. She bites it.

THOMAS J
Ouch! Why'd ya do that for.

VADA
I couldn't breathe. You know how frail I am.

MOTHER(OS)
Thomas James Senft, I'm not gonna shout again!

Thomas J jumps up and runs to his house. From Vada's PO we see Thomas J being scolded by his mother. They go in Vada stands there for a few seconds.

INT. FOYER

Vada walks in the quiet house and goes upstairs.

INT. BEDROOM

Vada walks in and hears a car pull up. She looks out the window and sees Harry helping Shelly out of the car.

EXT STREET - SAME TIME

Harry and Shelly walk to the camper.

SHELLY
I had a good time tonight.

HARRY
It's been a long time since I had a bingo partner.

Shelly fumbles around in her purse for the keys.

SHELLY
Would you like to come in?

HARRY
Well...

SHELLY
Just for a minute?

HARRY
Ok, but only for a minute.

Shelly opens the door, and they walk inside.

SHELLY
Have you ever seen my house before?

Harry becomes tangled up in the hanging beads.

HARRY
No, it's a...nice.

SHELLY
Can I get you something to drink?

HARRY
No, I'm fine.

They sit down. Shelly puts her hand on Harry's knee. He becomes nervous. Shelly leans over to him. Harry sudden springs up.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HARRY
I'm sorry Shelly. I don't think I can do this.

Shelly stands facing him.

SHELLY
It's all right.

HARRY
This dating stuff is all new to me. I've never dated anyone since my wife died.

SHELLY
How did she die?

Harry sits down. Shelly sits beside him.

HARRY
We were much older when we had Vada, and the pregnancy was hard on her. She died two days after Vada was born.

SHELLY
I'm so sorry.

HARRY
Yeah,...well, I better get going

Harry gets up to leave. Shelly follows him. He opens th door and stands half in and half out of the camper.

SHELLY
Harry, can we play bingo again sometime?

Harry looks into her eyes. He goes for it. They awkward kiss.

HARRY
Yes.

INT. VADA'S BEEDROOM - SAME TIME

Vada witnesses the kiss. Alarmed, she runs in front of h mirror. She then holds a clump of her hair with her left hand so it stands straight up. She karate chops it with her right hand. The clump of hair falls out. She looks down at the clump in her hand.

VADA(VO)
Darn chemotherapy.

EXT. COMMUNITY CENTER - DAY

Vada and the group sit in the grass.

BIXLER
I thought we'd try group meditation today.

PERSEPHONE
Far-out!

VADA
What's that?

RED FLOWER
Oh it's really cool. Ok, like what you have to do is send out your vibes to the group.

BIXLER
If you can get in touch with other people's feelings, your poetry will improve. Come on, get in a circle.

The group reassembles itself into a circle.

BIXLER
Get into the meditation position and just relax. You should feel what the other person is feeling without speaking any words.

The group gets into the position except for Vada. Red Flower helps her assume the position. They all hold han

BIXLER
Ok, close your eyes, relax your muscles, and breathe easily.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The group gets right into it, except Vada. She's uncomfortable and peeks at everyone else. There is silence for a few seconds.

BIXLER
(talking over meditation)
Send out your vibes and receive them at the same time...Can you feel it?

There is silence for a few more seconds.

BIXLER
Ok, open your eyes.

The group opens their eyes. The still continue to hold hands.

GLENN
That was really groovy.

PERSEPHONE
Heavy.

GLENN
Can I start.

BIXLER
Sure.

GLENN
I could feel that Tamara is one with the earth. She's so cosmically in tune.

TAMARA
So right on! That's exactly what I sent out. And I felt you were full of peace and inner harmony.

GLENN
Wow!

PERSEPHONE
(excited)
My turn! Ok, like (turns to Red Flower) you are overflowing with love and light.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RED FLOWER
(to Persephone)
And I can feel fertility flowing through every limb of your body.

BIXLER
And Vada, what did you feel from Red Flower?

VADA
(pauses)
I feel that he has a hangnail.

The mood is broken.

BIXLER
No, Vada! That's not what we're after. A hangnail is insignificant. What's in his soul? Feel his aura.

VADA
I don't think I'm allowed to.

TAMARA
Here try these. They're love beads. They'll permeate you with peace, love and joy.

Tamara takes the love beads off from around her neck and puts them on Vada.

BIXLER
We'll give you another shot. Let's do it again. This time get in touch, Vada. Go deep.

Everyone closes his eyes, even Vada.

BIXLER
Let the energy flow...connect.

There is silence as they meditate. After a few seconds hear:

VADA(VO)
Gramoo once had a hangnail on her big toe. It got infected, and the doctor had to slice it off...I don't think Gramoo thought is was insignificant.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Vada, in her pajamas, gets out of bed.

INT. HALLWAY

Vada walks through the quiet house.

INT. GRAMOO'S BEDROOM

Gramoo lies in her bed. Vada cautiously peers into the r and walks in . She sits on the bed and gets into the meditation position. She holds Gramoo's hand hoping to connect with her in the darkness.

INT. DOWNSTAIRS BATHROOM - DAY

Shelly stands in front of the mirror applying lipstick. Vada walks by. Shelly sees her in the mirror.

SHELLY
Hey Vada.

VADA
Are you going out somewhere?

SHELLY
Nope.

VADA
So how come you're puttin' lipstick on?

SHELLY
A girl's always got to look her best.

VADA
I think lipstick looks fake. No one has lips that red.

SHELLY
Have you ever tried any?

VADA
No.

SHELLY
Sit down here.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Shelly points to the toilet, and Vada sits down. Shelly bends down and puts lipstick on Vada. She squirms.

SHELLY
Quit squirming. I'm gonna miss your mouth.

Shelly finishes.

SHELLY
Ok. Take a look. Wait, blot your lips with this.

Shelly rips a piece of toilet paper off the roll and han it to Vada. She blots her lips. They look in the mirro

SHELLY
I think it looks real pretty on you.

Vada licks her lips.

VADA
It tastes funny.

SHELLY
You're not supposed to eat it.

Vada looks in the mirror

VADA
Do you think I'm pretty?

SHELLY
Oh Vada, you're very pretty. You've got great big sparkling eyes, and the cutest little nose.

VADA
The boys at school don't think I am.

SHELLY
What do they know. Boys at that age are more interested in snakes and puppy dog tails. You just wait. They'll come around.

Vada smiles.

(CONINTUED)

CONTINUED:

SHELLY
Sit down again. I wanna bring out those gorgeous eyes of yours. Now, the first rule in applying makeup is that you can never wear enough blue eyeshadow.

Vada sits as Shelly pulls out the blue eyeshadow.

SHELLY
Close you eyes.

Vada closes her eyes as Shelly applies the eyeshadow.

VADA
Do you like putting makeup on people?

SHELLY
Yes, but I've been trying to get to Hollywood for years now so I could do makeup for all the movie stars, but I haven't gotten there yet.

VADA
It's probably better. I've heard they can be different.

They laugh.

SHELLY
Open your eyes and have a look.

Vada opens her eyes as they stand in front of the mirror The eyeshadow looks horrible on Vada.

VADA
Shelly, did you ever have any kids?

SHELLY
No.

EXT. FRONT PORCH

Thomas J sits on the front steps. Vada, still wearing t makeup, walks out.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

THOMAS J
Your lip bleeding?

VADA
No.

THOMAS J
What's wrong with your eyes?

VADA
A girl can never wear enough eyeshadow.

Thomas J's confused. He picks up his bike and gets on.

THOMAS J
Where's your bike?

VADA
In the garage, give me a ride.

Before he can answer, Vada jumps on his bike seat. Thomas struggles to get pedaling, but finally gets it.

INT. GARAGE

Vada opens the garage door. There is junk everywhere. Sh walks over to her bike as Thomas J sits on his bike watchi

VADA
Hey one of my streamers is gone!

Only one set of streamers hangs from her handlebars. Thomas J puts his bike down to come to her aid. Vada looks around on the ground.

VADA
They probably fell off in here. Help me look.

Thomas J looks behind a box. He then looks in the box, comes across an old photograph and examines it.

THOMAS J
Hey Vada, look at the old picture of your dad!

Vada walks over to him.

(C)NTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VADA
Where?

THOMAS J
I found it in this box.

Vada looks at the picture. It's of Harry, smiling proudly in front of a new '55 Chevy.

THOMAS J
(laughs)
Look at that corny old car!

Vada looks through the box. She comes across another photograph of Harry with a woman (Vada's mother) standing in front of the same car. Vada stares intensely at it.

THOMAS J
Who's that with your dad?

VADA
It's my mother.

Vada is overcome by the photo. She sits down on the box. Thomas J sits behind her.

THOMAS J
Do you remember her?

VADA
No.

THOMAS J
Where do you think she is.

VADA
Gramoo said she's in heaven.

THOMAS J
What do you think it's like?

VADA
What?

THOMAS J
Heaven.

CONTINUED:

VADA
I think (pauses) everyone gets their own white horse, and all they do is ride'em and eat marshmellows all day long. And everybody is best friends with everybody else, and when they play sports there are no teams so no one gets picked last.

THOMAS J
What if you're afraid to ride horses?

VADA
It doesn't matter, 'cause they're not regular horses. They got wings, and it's no big deal if you fall. You just land in a cloud.

THOMAS J
Doesn't sound so bad. (Beat) Come on let's go. We'll never find your streamers.

Thomas J goes to his bike. Vada puts the photo down and gets on her bike. Thomas J pedals ahead of Vada. Vada stops her bike, jumps off, runs back into the garage and retrieves the photo. She folds it into her pocket.

THOMAS J(OS)
Hurry up!

Vada jumps on her bike and pedals away.

EXT BACKYARD - DUSK

Harry cooks hamburgers and hot dogs on the barbecue. Thei is a nice spread of food on the picnic table. Shelly and Vada, wearing her love beads, play horseshoes. Vada throv the horseshoe around the spike. She is victorious. She jumps around with her hands clasped over her head giving the "champion sign."

VADA
I won! I won! Champ Vada! Pro Vada!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHELLY
Congratulations. Let's see how your father's doing.

Vada and Shelly walk over to the barbecue. Shelly gives Harry a playful little hug from behind.

SHELLY
How you making out; chef?

HARRY
Almost ready.

SHELLY
I love your apron.

Harry smiles. Vada rolls her eyes.

SHELLY
Why don't we put a little music on. I bought a Beatles album yesterday.

HARRY
I don't go for that long hair hippie stuff.

Vada quickly tucks her love beads under her shirt.

HARRY
These'll be ready in a minute.

Vada tugs at Shelly.

VADA
Let's play another game.

SHELLY
No, honey you tired me out.

VADA
Please.

SHELLY
Maybe later, I wanna talk to your dad.

HARRY
Come and get it. Get yourself a roll.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHELLY
Harry, do you want a hamburger or hotdog?

HARRY
Hamburger.

Shelly grabs two hamburger rolls. Vada takes a hotdog ro- Harry gives them their food and scoops the baked beans tha are being warmed up on the barbarque, onto their plates.

SHELLY
Come on, Vada. I made some potato salad and coleslaw.

Harry and Shelly sit on the same side of the picnic table as Vada sits across form them.

VADA
What time are we going to the fireworks?

SHELLY
We thought we'd stay home and watch'em from here. Your daddy says you'll be able to see from the backyard.

HARRY
Besides, parking'll be a mess.

VADA
But you said we'd go. We go every year.

HARRY
You're getting too old for that anyway.

Vada sullenly eats. She chews her good like a cow as Harry and Shelly flirt with each other. Vada continues to chew and then opens her mouth - seefood.

VADA
Look.

Harry and Shelly don't pay attention to her. Vada drops her fork and bends down to get it. While under the tabl she sees Harry's hand on Shelly's knee. She crawls unde the table and pops up between them causing Harry to drop his hamburger on his lap.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VADA
I wanna sit over here.

HARRY
For Christ's sakes, Vada!
What are you doing?

VADA
Nothing.

HARRY
You got mustard on my shirt!
Go make a plate for Gramoo and
bring it to her.

Vada gets up, grabs a plate and walks over the the barbecu
She puts a hamburger on the plate. As she does this Harry
shouts:

HARRY(OS)
Don't give her any baked beans!

Vada turns her back to them, lifts up a big serving spoon
and scoops a ton of baked beans onto the plate. A
sinister look comes over her face.

INT. FOYER - DAY

Vada runs down the stairs past Shelly.

SHELLY
Hey where are you off too?

VADA
Nowhere. I'm late.

Vada runs out.

INT. FRONT YARD

Vada hops on her bike and pedals down the street. second
later, Red Flower pulls up next to her on his motorcycle.
"Age of Aquarius" plays as Vada drops her bike and gets
a lift from Red Flower. This scene goes into the followi
montage:

Persephone paints a peace sign on Vada's face.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Glenn strums a guitar as the rest sit on the grass beside him and sing.

The group meditates.

Bixler picks a flower and sticks it in Vada's hair. She's smitten.

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

Vada takes her shoe off, places it between the door and the wall and walks downstairs. Wendy sits on the stool reading.

VADA
Where's everybody?

WENDY
Dad and Shelly went out.

VADA
Where'd they go?

WENDY
I don't know. But there's a casserole in the refrigerator you can heat up.

VADA
Daddy likes Shelly, Doesn't he?

WENDY
I don't know.

VADA
Does he love her?

WENDY
Love is nothing more than a momentary distraction from the emptiness of life.

Vada thinks about that for a second.

VADA
Look what Mr. Bixler gave me!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Vada holds up her flower.

WENDY
So what.

VADA
He's my teacher. I think he likes me.

WENDY
(rolls eyes)
Please.

VADA
He does!

WENDY
Vada, he's a grown man. He can't possibly like you.

VADA
You're just sayin' that 'cause nobody ever likes you!

WENDY
Grow up, Vada. You're just a little girl.

VADA
I am not!

Vada stick her forefingers in her ears so she won't hear Wendy and mumbles gibberish. Over the gibberish we hear:

VADA(VO)
My sister usta be a nicer person when she was engaged to a guy named Jason. But he dumped her to follow the "Dead." And now she buries the dead....I think it could have worked out.

INT. EXAMINING ROOM - DAY

Vada sits on the table and opens her mouth as Dr. Welty looks down her throat.

VADA
Can't you see it?

CONTINUED:

WELTY
No.

VADA
It's there.

WELTY
Vada, there's no chicken bone stuck in your throat.

Vada abruptly shuts her mouth and points to his diplomas on the wall.

VADA
Dr. Welty are you sure those are yours?

INT. DOCTOR"S WAITING ROOM

Thomas J sits on top of the counter talking with the nu She shows him a syringe.

NURSE
See you put the water in here and now you have...

The nurse pushes down on the plunger and water squirts

NURSE
A water gun.

THOMAS J
Cool, can I get one for Vada?

NURSE
Sure, honey.

The nurse walks to a cabinet, pulls out another syri: hands it to Thomas J.

NURSE
Thomas, does Vada ever tell you why she comes down here so much?

THOMAS J
'Cause she's dying.

NURSE
Do you think she is?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

THOMAS J
No.

NURSE
Why do you think she says that?

THOMAS J
I think she gets scared of all the dead people in her house. And you know how they say if you can't beat'em join'em? If she's one of them, then it's not as scary.

NURSE
Vada's lucky to have a friend like you.

THOMAS J
She's my best friend.

Vada walks out of the examining room and over to Thomas J.

NURSE
You feeling any better, Miss Vada?

VADA
As good as can be expected.

Thomas J holds up the syringes.

THOMAS J
Look what we got! You can use'em as squirt guns.

Thomas J jumps down.

THOMAS
Let's go try'em! Bye, Nurse Randall.

NURSE
Bye, kids.

Vada and Thomas J run out.

INT. LAKE

Vada and Thomas J run around trying to squirt each other with the syringes. They're having a good time.

THOMAS J
I got you!

VADA
You did not!

Thomas J chases her over to a tree and spots a beehive in the tree. He stops. Vada walks over to him.

VADA
What are you lookin' at?

THOMAS J
There's a beehive up there.

VADA
Where?

Thomas J points Vada's head in the direction of the beehi

THOMAS J
(points)
Up there.

VADA
So?

THOMAS J
Let's knock it down.

VADA
Are you crazy? You'll get stung.

THOMAS J
Stand back.

Vada and Thomas J keep a good distance from the hive. Thomas J picks up a rock and throws it at the hive. He misses.

VADA
Why do you want the darn thing anyway?

THOMAS J
'Cause they're neat.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He throws another stone and hits the hive, but it doesn't fall.

VADA
Let me try.

Both throw several rocks at the hive. It falls.

THOMAS J
We got it!

Vada looks down at her hand. It's bare.

VADA
Ah! My mood ring! It fell off! Help me find it.

As they search for the ring, the bees begin to swarm. Thomas J spots them.

THOMAS J
They're alive! Run for your life!

At that instant, Vada finds the ring but drops it when Thomas J yells. She jumps up and runs with Thomas J to the lake.

THOMAS J
They're after us.

VADA
Jump in the water!

THOMAS J
But I got my clothes on!

Vada doesn't have time to argue. She jumps in the water Thomas J hesitates then jumps in. They stay under water

INT. FOYER

Vada walks in soaking wet. She looks around hoping not be spotted. She tiptoes upstairs. She's almost to the stairs when we hear:

HARRY(OS)
Vada, is that you?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VADA
Yes.

Harry is in the kitchen/family room feeding Gramoo.

HARRY(OS)
We're gonna go to York tonight to the fair. Be ready to go in five minutes.

Vada smiles.

HARRY(OS)
Shelly's going with us.

Her smile fades.

EXT. CARNIVAL - EARLY EVENING

A country carnival is going on. People ride the ferris wheel and the merry-go-round. A little boy eats cotton candy. A clown falls into the water in the dunking booth

EXT. OPEN LOT

Harry, Shelly and Vada park the car as a BOY SCOUT direct them.

EXT. CARNIVAL

Harry, Shelly and Vada walk through the carnival.

SHELLY
Oh I just love the carnival. Vada, which ride is your favorite?

VADA
I like the freak show.

SHELLY
(giddy)
Look there's the merry-go-round! Come on!

Shelly pulls Harry and Vada to the ride. The music "Spinning Wheel" plays.

EXT. MERRY-GO-ROUND

Vada rides one of the horses. Harry and Shelly sit in a carriage behind her holding hands. Vada's disgusted.

EXT. GOLDFISH BOOTH

Harry and Shelly watch as Vada throws a ping pong ball into one of the numerous fish bowls that are stacked up. Each fish bowl contains a goldfish. She misses. Harry puts another quarter on the counter, and the ATTENDANT hands Vada another ping pong ball. She throws it. It lands in a fish bowl.

EXT. FERRIS WHEEL - NIGHT

Vada sits between Harry and Shelly as they ride the ferris wheel. She holds her goldfish in a plastic bag.

EXT. CARNIVAL

As Harry, Shelly and Vada walk through the carnival, Shelly nudges Harry and points to Vada. She motions to tell her Harry shrugs meaning "I don't know."

EXT. TIN CAN BOOTH

Vada holds her goldfish. Shelly stands next to her as Harry throws a baseball at a stack of tin cans and knocks them over. Vada and Shelly cheer for him. The attendant then hands Harry a stuffed animal. Everything is going just fine until Harry hands the prize, not to Vada, but to Shelly. The music stops.

EXT. ROLLERCOASTER

Vada, Harry and Shelly are strapped in. Vada sits in the middle holding her fish.

HARRY
I'm too old for this.

The rollercoaster begins to move. Shelly grabs onto the safety bar in front. Vada notices that she's wearing a diamond ring.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VADA
(pointing to ring)
When'd you get that?

Harry and Shelly exchange glances. "Should they tell?" The rollercoaster slowly climbs a hill. We hear the click-click-click.

SHELLY
Oh tell her. I don't think I can keep it in for much longer.

HARRY
All right. Vada, Shelly and I are getting married.

Just as Vada hears the news, the rollercoaster reaches the top and plummets down. Vada screams. The other people on the ride join in screaming. The rollercoaster continues to go around.

EXT. PLATFORM

Harry, Shelly and Vada get off the rollercoaster. Vada looks pale.

HARRY
So what'd ya think?

VADA
I think I'm gonna be sick.

HARRY
Too fast a ride?

VADA
I guess.

Shelly puts her arm around Vada.

SHELLY
Now you and I will get to spend all our time together and do all sorts of fun things.

(CONTINUED)

EXT. CARNIVAL

Harry, Shelly and Vada walk through to exit the carnival.

HARRY
I'm ready to call it a night.

SHELLY
And I want you to be my maid of honor.

VADA
Do I have to wear a dress?

SHELLY
Yes.

HARRY
Of course she'll do it.

VADA
If I have to then I'm wearing shorts underneath.

They continue walking. Vada spies the bumper cars.

VADA
I wanna ride the bumper cars.

HARRY
No, it's late.

VADA
Please.

SHELLY
It sounds like fun. I'll ride them with you. Harry, hold her fish.

EXT. BUMPER CARS

Harry stands holding the fish as Vada and Shelly ride ar in separate cars. After a few seconds Shelly gets her c stuck in a corner. Vada sees that Shelly is cornered. Suddenly a sinister look comes over Vada's face. She charges Shelly at full speed. Bang-she rams into Shelly car. A puzzled look comes over Shellys face. She realizes that this is no longer a game. As Vada continu to ram her car over and over, we hear:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VADA(VO)
Once Robin Snelbaker told me I was voted the most popular girl of the fourth grade. She lied. I got best personal hygiene instead...But I've learned to channel disappointment in a healthy way.

EXT. THOMAS J'S HOUSE - DAY

Vada knocks on the front door. Thomas J's mother answers it.

MOTHER
Hi Vada.

VADA
Can Thomas come out?

MOTHER
Sure, come on in.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Thomas J comes down the stairs as Vada enters.

THOMAS J
Hey Vada.

VADA
Hi. Wanna ride bikes?

THOMAS J
Yeah.

MOTHER
Did you make your bed?

THOMAS J
Yes.

MOTHER
You're not lying? "Cause if I go up, and it's not made...

THOMAS J
It's made.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MOTHER
Come here, you've got a milk moustache.

Thomas J sits down on the sofa. His mother bends down, licks her fingers and wipes his mouth. Thomas J squirms. Vada watches them with envy. If only she had a mother to wipe her moustache.

THOMAS J
Let's go.

Thomas J jumps up.

THOMAS J
Bye mom.

His mother kisses him. Vada still watches.

MOTHER
Have fun kids.

EXT. STREET

Vada and Thomas J pick up their bikes and get on.

VADA
I'm running away.

THOMAS J
Where are you going?

VADA
Don't you wanna know why?

THOMAS J
Ok, why?

VADA
It's none of your business.

They pedal a little distance.

THOMAS J
Where are you running to?

VADA
California. I'm going to Hollywood to live with the Brady Bunch.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

THOMAS J
I wanna live with them too.

VADA
No, you can't. They have enough kids. You'll have to stay with the Partridge Family.

They pedal away.

EXT STREET - A FEW HOURS LATER

Vada and Thomas J ride their bikes. Thomas J's exhausted. He stops his bike, lets it fall to the ground and lies down in the grass. Vada turns around and sees him.

VADA
You sissy!

Vada stops.

THOMAS J
I'm tired of running away. Besides, we passed this street three times. We're not getting nowhere.

Vada hates to admit it, but he's right. She drops her bike and lies down beside him.

THOMAS J
So why were you running away?

VADA
My dad gave Shelly a ring.

THOMAS J
(impressed)
Ew, was it a decoder ring?

VADA
You're such a retard.

THOMAS J
Why?

VADA
It was a wedding ring.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

THOMAS J
They're getting married?

Vada shakes her head "yes."

THOMAS J
So now you'll have a mother.

VADA
I don't like her.

THOMAS J
I do. She's real funny.

VADA
(almost inaudible)
He likes her better than me.

THOMAS J
What?

VADA
Never mind.

EXT. TREE - DUSK

Vada and Thomas J hide up in a tree across the street fr
Vada's house. Thomas J hangs upside down from a branch.

THOMAS J
Vada, did we hide out long enough?

VADA
No.

Thomas J gets up.

THOMAS J
I'm hungry. I can't last
any longer.

VADA
Well then go home baby.

THOMAS J
I have to anyway. My mom'll
be worried.

This sets Vada off.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VADA
Leave then! Some friend you are!

THOMAS J
You can come to my house for dinner.

VADA
No. I'm hiding out!

THOMAS J
Ok, I'll see ya.

Thomas J climbs down the tree. Vada sits in the tree all alone. Her stomach growls.

EXT. TREE - NIGHT

Vada still sits up in the tree. Seconds later, she climbs down and walks across the street to her house.

INT. FOYER

Vada walks in. She slams the front door to make her presence known. She smiles from ear to ear and waits for a second, but no one comes running. She walks past the family room and sees Harry sleeping with a newspaper across his chest. Gramoo is silent as ever in her rocker Wendy is most likely in the basement. She walks solemnly up the stairs, goes into her bedroom and shuts the door. On the closed door we hear:

VADA(VO)
In social studies, we read about the Lindberg baby. Some people stole him right out of his house... I think I'll sleep with the window open tonight.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - DAY

Vada is in the bathroom. We see the closed door.

VADA(OS)
Oh my God!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Vada races out of the bathroom and down the stairs. She's hysterical.

INT. FOYER

Vada frantically calls out for Wendy.

VADA
Wendy! Wendy!

INT. BASEMENT

Vada races down.

VADA
Wendy!

No one is there.

INT. FOYER

Vada runs back up

VADA
Daddy!

Shelly walks in through the front door.

SHELLY
Vada, what's wrong?

VADA
Where's Wendy?

SHELLY
She went with your dad to do some errands. What's the matter?

VADA
I'm hemorrhaging. The cancer's getting worse.

SHELLY
What do you mean by hemorrhaging?

VADA
I don't want your help! I need Gramoo!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Shelly kneels in front of Vada and holds her by the arms.

SHELLY
Vada, did this happen in the bathroom? Vada?

Vada nods her head "yes."

SHELLY
Come upstairs with me. We need to have a talk.

INT. BEDROOM

Shelly and Vada sit on the bed.

VADA
(disgusted)
And daddy and my mother did that?

SHELLY
Vada, it's a very beautiful thing, and look there never would have been a Vada.

VADA
I think it should be outlawed.

SHELLY
Believe me someday you'll feel different.

The doorbell rings. Shelly looks out the window.

SHELLY
It's Thomas J.

VADA
I don't wanna see him. It's not fair. Nothing happens to boys.

SHELLY
Vada, you can't hide up here. Nothing's changed. Come on go get the door.

INT. FOYER

Vada answers the door for Thomas J.

THOMAS J
Hi Vada, can you come out?

VADA
I don't know.

THOMAS J
Please, it's really hot. We could go swimming.

Vada becomes violent.

VADA
No! Get out of here!

Vada pushes him, and he falls on the porch.

VADA
Get out and don't come back for five to seven days!

Vada slams the door. A puzzled Thomas J sits on the porc

INT. FOYER - DAY

A viewing is going on. Mourners walk into the viewing rc As Vada locks Gramoo up she overhears Harry ahd Shelly in the other room causing her to haphazardly lock the door. She walks to the showcase room.

INT. SHOWCASE ROOM

Vada watches Harry and Shelly from the hallway. They flirt and kiss.

INT. KITCHEN/FAMILY ROOM - SAME TIME

Gramoo is up and sliding the door open.

INT. SHOWCASE ROOM - NEXT SECOND

Vada continues to watch Harry and Shelly kiss.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HARRY
I have to get out there.

SHELLY
Oh let the dead bury the dead.

INT. FOYER - SAME TIME

Gramoo shuffles across to the viewing room.

INT. VIEWING ROOM

Gramoo shuffles in. An old man lies in the casket as mourners sit in front of him. A single red rose lies on his casket. Gramoo stands in front of the "audience," picks up the rose and uses it as a microphone. In her booming voice, she sings out "There's No Business Like Show Business."

INT. SHOWCASE ROOM - SAME TIME

Harry and Shelly hear Gramoo singing and race out past V

INT. VIEWING ROOM - SECONDS LATER

Harry and Shelly race in a Vada watches from the foyer. Gramoo continues to sing and even attempts a few dance steps.

HARRY
I'm so sorry. I've got her.
Come on Mama. It's all right.

Harry leads a singing Gramoo out. He walks her across t foyer and into the kitchen/family room.

INT. FOYER

Vada and Shelly watch as Harry locks Gramoo up. Harry finishes, grabs Vada and shakes her.

HARRY
(in an angry whisper)
What were you thinking. It's your responsibility to lock her up. Do you have any idea how upset those people are in there?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHELLY
I'm sure it was an honest mistake.

HARRY
Shelly please. (to Vada) Go find something to do 'till it's over.

Vada runs out the front door.

INT. STREET

Vada hops on her bike. She passes Thomas J on his bike.

THOMAS J
Hey, wait up!

EXT. LAKE - AN HOUR LATER

Vada and Thomas J lie down by the lake under the weeping willow. Thomas J chews on a blade of grass.

VADA
Why do you think people want to get married?

THOMAS J
When you get to be old, you just have to.

VADA
Who are you gonna marry?

THOMAS J
My parents'll find someone for me.

VADA
I'm gonna marry Mr. Bixler.

THOMAS J
You can't marry a teacher. It's against the law.

VADA
It is not.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

THOMAS J
Yes it is. 'Cause then he'll give you all "A"s, and it won't be fair.

VADA
Not true. (beat) Have you ever kissed anyone?

THOMAS J
Like they do on TV?

VADA
Yeah.

THOMAS J
No.

Vada becomes shy.

VADA
Maybe we should. Just to see what's the big deal.

THOMAS J
I don't know how.

VADA
Here practice on your arm like this.

Vada starts kissing her arm. Thomas J does the same. After a few seconds, they stop.

VADA
Ok, enough practice. Close your eyes.

THOMAS J
I won't be able to see.

VADA
(showing him her fist)
Just do it.

Thomas J closes his eyes.

VADA
On the count of three. One... Two...Two and a half...Three.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Vada closes her eyes and kisses Thomas J on the lips. They then break away and look dumbfounded at each other. There is silence. Vada becomes nervous.

VADA
Say something. It's too quiet.

THOMAS J
Um...um...

VADA
Hurry.

THOMAS J
I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United...

Thomas J stands up and puts his hand over his chest.

THOMAS J
States of America and to the republic for which...

Vada stands up, places her hand on her chest and joins Thomas J.

THOMAS J and VADA
it stands one nation under God indivisible with liberty and justice for all.

EXT. STREET - DUSK

Vada and Thomas J ride bikes down the street.

VADA
Don't you tell anyone.

THOMAS J
Well you better not either.

Vada stops her bike. Thomas J also stops.

VADA
Let's spit on it.

THOMAS J
Ok.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Each spits in his hand, and they shake.

VADA
See ya tomorrow.

THOMAS J
All right, see ya.

Vada pedals away.

THOMAS J
Vada!

VADA
What?

Vada stops.

THOMAS J
(shyly)
Would you...would you think of me?

VADA
For what?

THOMAS J
If you don't get to marry Mr. Bixler.

Vada smiles.

THOMAS J
I guess.

Vada pedals off. A thrilled Thomas J pedals away.

INT. FOYER - MINUTES LATER

Vada walks upstairs past Shelly.

SHELLY
Dinner'll be ready in ten minutes. Go wash up.

Vada doesn't answer.

EXT. FIELD - SAME TIME

Thomas J rides his bike to the tree where the beehive was throws his bike down, and looks for something in the gras He searches for a few seconds and finds Vada's mood ring. Success. He clutches it in his hand. He walks back to h bike, not watching where he's going. Suddenly, he steps on the beehive. Several bees fly up his pants leg. He jumps around trying to swat them. Hundreds of bees then attack him and cover his face. He screams and fall to th ground. We see his hand with the mood ring in a tight fi

INT. FOYER - MORNING

The doorbell rings. Harry answers it. A POLICEMAN enter He talks to Harry. We cannot hear their conversation. T policeman leaves. Harry runs to the bathroom and shuts t door. We hear him vomiting.

INT. VADA'S BEDROOM - MINUTES LATER

Harry knocks and enters. Vada feeds her goldfish.

HARRY
Hi Vada.

VADA
(suspiciously)
Hi.

HARRY
What are you doing?

VADA
Feeding my fish.

HARRY
Is that the fish you won at the carnival?

VADA
Yes.

HARRY
He's getting big. (pause) Vada, come sit next to me.

Harry sits on the bed and pats it for Vada to sit down. Vada sits next to him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HARRY
Vada, something has happened to Thomas J. He stepped on a beehive last night.

VADA
I told him not to tease those bees. Did he get stung?

Harry nods his head "yes."

VADA
Maybe I should go over and yell at him.

HARRY
No, sweetheart. You can't.

VADA
Why not?

HARRY
He was allergic to the bees.

VADA
(fear growing)
He's ok, isn't he?

Harry stares at the floor.

VADA
Tell me! What's wrong?!

Harry bites his trembling lip.

HARRY
There were just too many of them. I'm sorry, Vada.

Harry tries to hug her. She violently pulls away with a yell.

VADA
No! Children don't die. You said the coffins weren't for children!

HARRY
Vada, please.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VADA
No! Get out! Get out!

Vada throws things at Harry.

HARRY
Vada.

VADA
I hate you.

Harry stands up.

VADA
Get out! I hate you, you liar!

Harry leaves as Vada continues to throw things at him.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - MID MORNING

Vada runs in bypassing the nurse.

INT. EXAMINING ROOM

Vada runs in. Welty turns around to see her.

WELTY
Vada, what's wrong?

VADA
I can't breathe! I'm suffocating!

WELTY
It's all right. Take deep breaths. Come on lie up here.

Welty leads Vada to the table. She lies down. The nurse walks in.

VADA
It hurts. It hurts so bad.

WELTY
What hurts, Vada?

VADA
The bee stings. I can't breathe.

INT. FOYER

Shelly and Vada walk in. Vada walks up to her room. Harry enters.

HARRY
How is she?

SHELLY
Not good. She won't talk to me. Why don't you speak to her.

HARRY
I can't.

Harry walks out the front door.

EXT. PORCH

Harry sits down and puts his head in his hands. After a seconds Shelly comes out and sits beside him.

SHELLY
Harry, why can't you talk to her?

HARRY
What would I say? I'm sorry, Vada, but these things happen.

SHELLY
You don't have to say anything. Just be with her.

There is a pause. Harry looks up at the house.

HARRY
I was born in this goddamn house. I remember on my eighth birthday, my mother planned a huge party for me and invited all my friends. And not one of them showed up. They were all too afraid to come. One mother thought the house was possessed. But, my father said not to be upset because we were doing a far greater service for the community. (beat) I really wanted that party.

Shelly holds his hand.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HARRY
I've must have seen hundreds of funerals in this house. When it's an old person you say, "Well, they had a wonderful life." But when (pause) when he's eleven... I still haven't figured it out.

Harry gets up to go inside.

HARRY
But I still have to do my job. They want the funeral tomorrow.

Harry walks inside.

INT. HALLWAY - DUSK

Shelly stands outside Vada's door.

SHELLY
(talking through door)
Vada, won't you come down for dinner? Vada, please, answer me.

Vada doesn't answer. Shelly tries to open the door but it's locked.

SHELLY
It's all right. You don't have to come out. I'll leave some food outside your door in case you get hungry.

Shelly turns to walk downstairs.

INT. FOYER - NEXT

As Shelly walks down the stairs, the doorbell rings. She answers the door. Judy stands in the doorway.

JUDY
Hi, is Vada home?

SHELLY
Yes, come in.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Judy enters. Shelly shuts the door.

JUDY
I'm in her class at school, and I wanted to tell her I'm sorry.

SHELLY
That's very kind of you, but Vada's very upset. She won't see anyone.

JUDY
(disappointed)
Oh.

SHELLY
But maybe she'll feel better in a couple of days.

JUDY
Will you tell her I came by?

SHELLY
I'll tell her.

JUDY
Thank you.

Judy opens the door and walks out.

SHELLY
Bye.

INT. BEDROOM - SAME TIME

Vada lies face down on her bed motionless.

INT. VIEWING ROOM - DAY

Thomas J's funeral is taking place. His body lies in a casket surrounded by flowers. He's not wearing his glasses. His face is swollen but not too badly. Thomas mother cries on the father's shoulder. A mourner kneels front of the coffin and says a prayer. Several other mourners sit in the chairs facing the casket.

INT. FOYER

The minister arrives. Harry greets him.

HARRY
Hello, Reverend Miles.

MINISTER
Hi, Harry.

They shake hands.

MINISTER
Is the family here?

HARRY
Yes.

MINISTER
I know the Senfts are grateful to you for taking care of things so quickly...excuse me, I'm gonna go see if they need anything.

INT. VIEWING ROOM

The minister walks over and talks to the Senfts.

INT. HALLWAY - SAME TIME

Shelly stands outside Vada's door.

SHELLY
(through door)
I see you ate everything. Vada, maybe you should come down for the funeral. Sometimes it helps... Vada?

INT. KITCHEN/FAMILY ROOM

Harry locks Gramoo up as Shelly walks in.

SHELLY
She still won't come out. It's been a whole day. You have to do something.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HARRY
The funeral's starting.

SHELLY
Open your eyes Harry. She's eleven years old, and her only friend in the world is dead!

HARRY
What do you want from me?

SHELLY
To stop hiding. You've lived your entire life among the dead, but you know nothing about it. You run, Harry.

HARRY
Run? Who lives in a camper, moving from town to town!

SHELLY
Do you wanna know why I took this job? I'll tell you why. I was so sick and tired of living in that thing...

Shelly points out the window to the camper.

SHELLY
...And when I saw your ad in the paper, believe me, the thought of working with dead people didn't thrill me, but when I drove by the house, I saw that a family lived here. And I thought that if I'm destined to live a life without a family or a home, then at least I could work in one, and hope that maybe once in a while I'd be invited for a family supper.

HARRY
And what about when those suppers are disrupted because a car crashed or a fire or a boy stepped on a beehive.

CONTINUED:

SHELLY
I'm not asking you to stop feeling for those people. (beat) Harry, you're a good man. But life isn't just death. Don't ignore the living. Don't ignore your daughter.

Just as Shelly finishes, the minister walks in.

MINISTER
I think it's best if we begin now.

HARRY
All right.

Harry turns to go into the viewing room. He and Shelly exchange a glance.

INT. VIEWING ROOM

The minister stands by the coffin holding a Bible.

MINISTER
Please be seated.

A few mourners sit in the chairs.

MINISTER
The family has asked me to say a few words before we proceed to the cemetery.

INT. BEDROOM - SAME TIME

Vada looks out the window at the hearse and sees two mourners, dressed in black, walking to the house. She walks over to her door and presses her ear against it. She hears the minister:

MINISTER(OS)
But there are no words that I could say that would begin to express the loss and grief we feel.

INT. HALLWAY - NEXT

Vada comes out of her room and sits on the top stair listening to the minister.

MINISTER
One word that keeps ringing in my head is "why?" Why would God take this little boy from us?

INT. VIEWING ROOM

The minister continues to speak.

MINISTER
Well I can't give you an answer to that question. But I can tell you that God has chosen Thomas for some very special purpose.

INT. FOYER - SAME TIME

Vada walks down the stairs and stands outside the viewin room peeking in. No one sees her.

INT. VIEWING ROOM

The minister continues.

MINISTER
And we must find solace knowing that Thomas is now in God's care. I would like to read a passage from the Bible, and hope it will be of some comfort.

As the minister looks in the Bible to find the passage, Vada walks in and stands off to the side. Harry and Shelly spot her. The minister continues.

MINISTER
Matthew 19 Verse 13. At one point, children were brought to Him so that He could place his hands on them in prayer. The diciples began to scold them,

(CONTINUED)

MINISTER(CONT'D)
but Jesus said, "Let the children come to me. Do not hinder them. The kingdom of God belongs to such as these." And he laid his hands on their heads before he left that place. (pause) Let us pray in silence for the soul of Thomas.

Everyone bows his head and prays. Vada walks up to the coffin as if she's in a trance, staring at Thomas J. Harry and Shelly are uneasy as they watch her. Suddenly, Vada crawls on the coffin.

VADA
Let's go tree climbing, Thomas J!

Harry, Shelly and two mourners run over to her. They try to pull her off the coffin. She gets hysterical and puts up a struggle.

VADA
His face hurts!

SHELLY
Vada, no!

VADA
Where's his glasses?! He can't see without them! Put his glasses on!

They finally pull her off. The mourners are shocked. H grabs her, and they look face to face.

HARRY
He's gone, Vada!

VADA
He was gonna be an acrobat.

Vada breaks away from Harry. She backs away from him.

HARRY
Please, sweetheart.

Vada shakes her head "no" and continues to back up. She then runs out the front door. Harry runs after her.

EXT. STREET

Vada runs down the street. Harry tries to follow but can't keep up.

HARRY
(shouts)
Vada!

INT. BIXLER'S HOUSE -, MINUTES LATER

Vada runs up to his front door, pauses for a second and knocks.

INT. BIXLER'S HOUSE

Bixler answers the door.

BIXLER
Vada, what's wrong? Are you ok? Come sit down.

Vada enters. Bixler sits her down in a chair and kneels to her level.

BIXLER
Vada, I heard about Thomas J. I'm so sorry. I didn't...

Vada begins to sing cutting him off.

VADA
Blitie, blop, bloopie, you twinkle above us, we twinkle...

BIXLER
(talking over her singing)
Ok, Vada, we don't have to talk about Thomas.

Vada stops singing.

Bixler
Vada, what is it.

Vada is silent for a few seconds.

VADA
Red Flower and Persephone say I should tell people what I feel.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BIXLER
Yes...

VADA
(pauses, then meekly says)
Mr. Bixler...I love you.

BIXLER
(caught off guard)
Oh Vada...I'm flattered, but I'm way too old for you.

VADA
Oh no, daddy's a lot older than Shelly.

BIXLER
But it's not the same.

VADA
And I could live here.

BIXLER
Vada, I think you father would miss you.

VADA
No, he wouldn't. I can't go home.

Suzanne, 28, walks in from the bedroom interrupting them. She wears a robe. Bixler and Vada look over to her.

SUZANNE
Hi, and who's this?

BIXLER
Vada, this is my fiancee, Suzanne.

SUZANNE
Hi Vada.

A look of horror comes over Vada's face. She doesn't answer Suzanne.

BIXLER
We're getting married in the fall. That's why I bought this house.

Vada stands up.

CONTINUED:

BIXLER
I'm real sorry about Thomas J.

Vada runs out.

EXT. STREET

Vada runs down the street.

EXT. FIELD

Vada runs to the weeping willow tree and climbs high up in it. She sits on a branch catching her breath, pulls the photo of her mother out and looks at it. Seconds later sh stuffs it back into her pocket and stands on the branch. She holds her arms out to the side and walks the branch as if she's walking a tightrope, tempting the fates. Suddenl she slips. She grabs ahold of the branch she was walking while her body hangs below her. We see her hand clinging for dear life to the branch.

EXT. PORCH - DUSK

A policeman rings the doorbell. Shelly answers.

INT. FOYER

Shelly lets the policeman inside.

POLICEMAN
I'm sorry ma'am, but we haven't found her yet.

SHELLY
(nearly hysterical)
It's getting dark. She can't be out alone in the dark.

POLICEMAN
We'll keep looking.

SHELLY
Her father's been out all day trying to find her. Her teacher called this afternoon. She went there.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POLICEMAN
Yes, you told us ma'am.

SHELLY
I can't just sit here. I should...

The front door opens. A scratched Vada walks in. Shelly runs and hugs her.

SHELLY
Vada, where have you been? We've been so worried about you.

SHELLY
(looks Vada over)
Are you all right?

Vada nods "yes."

SHELLY
Thank God. (looks at officer) Thank you.

POLICEMAN
Glad everything's all right.

The policeman leaves. Shelly hugs Vada again.

INT. BEDROOM

Shelly undresses Vada, puts her pajamas on, and tucks he in bed.

SHELLY
Your dad was so upset. He really does love you very much. It's just that some people have trouble saying how they feel.

VADA
I told Mr. Bixler that I...

SHELLY
(cuts her off)
I know. He told me. It's good that you tell people how you feel.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VADA
But he didn't like me.

SHELLY
Someday, believe me, someone will feel the same way about you, and it'll make it all worth it.

VADA
I should have told Thomas J he was my best friend.

SHELLY
I'm sure he knew.

VADA
Shelly?

SHELLY
Yes?

VADA
I stole your money from the cookie jar to take the writing class.

SHELLY
It's all right sweetheart.

VADA
I'll pay you back. And besides I'm never going to class again.

SHELLY
You just dedicate your first book to me, and I'll forget the whole thing.

VADA
I will. I promise.

Shelly hugs and kisses her goodnight.

SHELLY
Get some sleep.

INT. FOYER - NIGHT - TWO HOURS LATER

Shelly sits on the steps. Harry enters.

HARRY
Did she come home yet?

SHELLY
Yes, she's all right. She's upstairs sleeping.

Harry walks upstairs to Vada's bedroom. He opens the doo to her room.

INT. VADA'S BEDROOM

Harry enters. He keeps the door open. The light from th hallway illuminates Vada as she sleeps. Harry tucks her in and kisses her on the forehead. As he walks out, Vada calls out to him.

VADA
Did I kill my mother?

These words his Harry hard. He stops dead in his tracks.

HARRY
What?

VADA
The bees killed Thomas J, and I killed my mother.

Harry walks over to her bed and sits beside her.

HARRY
No, no. It wasn't your fault. It just happened.

VADA
This is her isn't it?

Vada pulls out the photo of Harry and her mother from under her pillow. Harry pauses for a few seconds and remembers.

HARRY
Yes...I forgot about that picture. Where did you find it?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VADA
In the garage.

Harry smiles at the photo.

HARRY
That was her favorite car.

VADA
What was my mother like?

HARRY
She was pretty and kind. And she had your eyes. And boy did she love to laugh. Sometimes when you laugh you sound just like her. (pause) When she found out that she was going to have you, you know what she did?

Vada shakes her head "no."

HARRY
She came home and started painting your room pink. She was sure she was going to have a little girl.

VADA
Do you miss her?

HARRY
Yes, I did for a long time. And even now, I sometimes get sad when I see a pretty flower or a beautiful sunset and know that your mother would have liked it.

VADA
I think every time I see a climbing tree I'll think of Thomas J.

Harry hugs her and bursts out into tears. Vada's not quite sure how to respond.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HARRY
(through his tears)
I'm sorry Vada. I'm so sorry. I wanted to keep you from it, but I just couldn't.

Vada finally hugs him back.

HARRY
People come in day after day. They bring their mothers, their fathers and their children. And they look to me to make things better, but all I can offer are a few nice words.

They break apart.

HARRY
You're a good girl, and I want you to be happy. Don't be like me.

Vada sniffles and wipes her hand against her nose. Harry kisses her on her head and rubs it. He notices her bald spot where she pulled her hair out.

HARRY
Are you feeling all right? Your hair looks like it's falling out. Maybe you should go see Dr. Welty.

VADA
No, it's nothing.

Harry gets up.

VADA
Daddy it's not so bad to be like you.

Harry takes another look at her, smiles and shuts the do

INT. FOYER - TWO WEEKS LATER

The doorbell rings. Harry answers it. Thomas J's mothe stands in the doorway.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HARRY
Mrs. Senft, please come in.

MOTHER
Thank you.

Thomas J's mother enters.

HARRY
How are you doing?

MOTHER
Some days I think I'll be ok, and others...I have to force myself to even get out of bed. It's crazy, but I sometimes think he's just away at summer camp...
(quickly changes the subject)
I came by to see Vada. Is she home?

HARRY
I'll get her.

As Harry walks upstairs, Vada meets him.

HARRY
Vada, Mrs. Senft would like to speak with you.

Vada's uneasy. Thomas J's mother bends down to talk to her as Harry watches.

MOTHER
Vada, Thomas J had this on him...

Thomas J's mother pulls out the mood ring from her pocke and places it in Vada's hand. It's upside down in her hand.

MOTHER
I thought you might like to have it.

Vada doesn't know what to do or say.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MOTHER
You were such a good friend to him. I hope you'll still come by and visit me.

Vada shakes her head "yes." Harry puts him arm around Vada as Thomas J's mother gets up to leave. Vada looks down at the ring and turns it over. It's no longer black--it's sky blue., Just as Thomas J's mother is about to shut the door behind her, Vada runs over to her.

VADA
Thomas J'll be all right. My mother will take care of him.

Thomas J's mother fights back a tear.

MOTHER
Thank you Vada.

She exits. Vada looks at the closed door.

INT. FOYER - A FEW WEEKS LATER - DAY

Life had returned to normal. Off camera we hear Gramoo singing "The Lady is a Tramp." Vada walks downstairs, wearing a dress for the first time, and locks Gramoo up. the viewing room is all set up for another funeral. Shelly walks by.

SHELLY
Vada, did you clean up your room?

VADA
Yes.

SHELLY
What time will you be back?

VADA
Before dinner.

SHELLY
Don't be late. I thought we'd try and get Wendy to join us in a good game of twister tonight.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VADA
Are we gonna play in the basement?

SHELLY
If that's what it takes.

Shelly gives Vada a kiss on the top of her head. Vada walks out the front door.

INT. COMMUNITY CENTER - MINUTES LATER

The group sits around the table.

BIXLER
This is our last class.

PERSEPHONE
I've been working on something I'd like to share with everyone.

BIXLER
A poem?

PERSEPHONE
No, I've prepared an interpretational dance to express what this class has meant to me.

RED FLOWER
Oh wow, that's heavy.

Persephone gets up and begins to perform her dance. It the most bizarre dance imaginable. The group, of course thinks it's a masterpiece. After a few seconds of danci Vada shows up, peeks around the corner and watches Persephone dance. Seconds later, Persephone stops. The group claps. Vada walks into the room. A few of the members rush over to her. Red Flower hugs her.

RED FLOWER
We missed ya man.

BIXLER
I was hoping you'd stop by today.

VADA
I can't stay. I just came to read my poem.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BIXLER
We'd love to hear it.

The group sits down. Vada stands.

VADA
Weeping willow with your tears running down, why do you always weep and frown? Is it because he left you one day, is it because he could not stay? On your brances he would swing, do you long for the happiness that day would bring? He found shelter in your shade, you thought his laughter could never fade. Weeping willow stop your tears, for there is something to calm your fears. You think death has ripped you forever apart, but I know he'll always be in your heart.

A few sniffles are heard. The group is touched by her poem. Red Flower gives her the "power to ya" sign.

EXT. COMMUNITY CENTER

Vada walks out. The leaves have begun to change color. Autumn is on its way. She goes over to pick her bike off the grass. Judy has been waiting for her. Vada and Judy ride off down the street. From the back, we see that Vada's dress has gotten caught in the short pants that she wears underneath the dress. After a few seconds we hear:

VADA(VO)
Things are a little better these days. I finally swallowed that chicken bone, Judy and I are gonna be in the same homeroom, and the Republican party just renominated Mr. Nixon.

THE END